

AUTHOR VISIT TOOLKIT

FOR IDAHO LIBRARIES



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INVITE AN AUTHOR TO YOUR SCHOOL OR PUBLIC LIBRARY

When an author visits your school, it provides opportunities to:

- Promote literacy
- Increase library relevance and visibility
- Foster collaboration
- Encourage enrichment and learning extension
- Have fun!

An author visit certainly promotes literacy. Students can be encouraged to read the author's books before the visit and will be excited to seek out those titles after the event is over. Most authors who do school visits will talk about reading and writing in their presentations, emphasizing the importance of these skills. They will also demonstrate to students that one can make a living by making up stories and writing them down. Having a real live author show up in your school or library makes reading and writing cooler than ever.

The library is central to the community--and yet sometimes it can feel like we're marginalized or not always a part of things. An author visit is a way for the library to take center stage in bringing a

whole grade level or the entire student body together for a fun, unifying event.

Simply planning the event will require collaboration with staff. It is a chance for teachers and administrators to see the librarian in a leadership role. An author visit is also the perfect opportunity to reach out to language arts teachers for collaborative projects or activities, both before and after the event. For students to be familiar with the author's work, teachers can be encouraged to read excerpts in class and promote the author's books in their classrooms in addition to the promotion you're doing in the library. If you work in a public library, you can coordinate with a partner school in the same ways.

Author visits are a chance for enrichment in other content areas as well. Depending on the author and what topics they will be talking about, you can invite social studies, art, music, science, and other teachers to create interesting activities that support and coincide with the author's visit and presentation topics.

Above all, hosting an author at your school or library should be fun! It can be a lot of work to prepare and manage, but it will all be worth it when your event has been a success; the visiting author thanks you for a great time; and your students, staff, and administrators come away satisfied and clamoring for the next big library event.

FIRST...

Talk to teachers, especially in language arts. Get their buy-in and enthusiasm for the idea of an author visit. Let them know you are simply looking at options for now, but make sure they have your back and are willing to join you in promoting the event. Help them understand that an author visit will promote literacy and make reading cool.

Talk to your administrators or director. Make sure they are on board with the idea of bringing an author to your organization. Find out if they would be agreeable to an assembly with an entire grade level or the whole school, a large community event, or if they would prefer a smaller program in the library or a classroom.



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WHOM DO I CONTACT TO ARRANGE AN AUTHOR VISIT?

Perhaps you've thought about bringing an author to your school or library, but you don't know how to get started. Whom do you contact? Their agent or publicist? Someone at the publisher? Is there a right or a wrong way to contact an author?

The truth is, getting in touch with an author is easier than ever these days. Most authors have a website, maintain a public email address, and are also probably on twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. As long as you're respectful and enthusiastic, there's no wrong way to contact an author.

Each author does things differently, and if they have a particular system set up for arranging events and appearances, they will let you know. A good first step is to check their website. Many authors have their basic information about events on their site, often including a contact person or email address to use for inquiries.

If you don't find any information about arranging events on their website, contact the author directly using whatever method is easiest for you or seems to be a preferred method of communication for the author. If you can find an email address for the author, start there.

Some authors are on Facebook daily, while others are active on Twitter or Instagram. It is perfectly reasonable these days to reach out to an author via social media -- although you probably want to do it privately through Messenger or a Direct Message.

HOW DO I MAKE THAT FIRST CONTACT? WHAT DO I SAY?

Know your expectations and parameters before sending an email or message. Why do you want this author in particular? Do you have specific dates in mind to coincide with school or community events, or are you flexible? Are you looking for a whole-school assembly, a community-wide event, a small program in the library, or workshops with certain classes?

When you first make contact with an author, start with a connection to your school, community, students, or classes. Give them a reason to want to visit you! Then get right to the point, so they understand this isn't just a friendly hello or fan letter. Keep it brief, provide the details that are important at your end, and ask about their system for scheduling events.

Contact an author as far in advance as possible.

SAMPLE EMAILS:



Dear Andy Author,

The readers here at Amazing Middle School love your books! Next fall, we are planning a school-wide "Everybody Reads" using your book "**How I Became a Hotshot**." We would love to have you come talk to our students sometime next October.

Do you do school visits? Are you available in October? Do you have a contact person for booking events? Let us know what costs would be involved and how best to proceed.

Thank you,
Linda Librarian

Dear Rebecca Writer,

Your book, "**Murder in McCall**," has been a huge hit here. Many of our kids have been to McCall and love the local details.

Do you do library visits? We would really enjoy having you come for an event sometime. Please let me know how you make arrangements for appearances and what details I would need to know in order to book a visit.

Thanks!
Lars Librarian



HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

That can vary widely depending on the author. That's one of the first things you'll find out when you contact them. Some authors will have a flat fee. Some charge per event or day, so it might be more expensive if they're at your school all day versus a one-hour appearance. Some will charge a fee and also expect you to pay for overnight lodging and a per diem for meals and/or transportation.

DO NOT make a case to an author for why they should visit your school free of charge. Yes, schools have tight budgets. Yes, authors are generous and love to talk to kids about their books. But this is their job, and for many authors, personal appearances and school visits are the way they make ends meet between book contracts. Or, they have a day job and have to take time off to do events. Honor authors as professionals by respecting the terms they have offered.

If an author is willing to do a visit for no charge, or has some sort of scholarship or grant program, they will be sure to let you know. Otherwise, do not try to negotiate a better rate or ask for an appearance fee to be waived.

I'D LOVE TO HOST AN AUTHOR, BUT I DON'T THINK WE CAN AFFORD IT.

Author visits can be expensive. But there are also many ways to make an author visit more affordable.

As you might expect, popular authors with an extensive list of familiar titles are usually more expensive. On the other hand, a first-time author or an author who hasn't hit it big yet is often much more affordable. Think about authors who have become popular with your readers but aren't a big name yet. Often those authors provide the best events anyway, because they're excited to be asked and still fresh to the idea of doing school or public library visits.

1. LEVERAGE ANOTHER VISIT

Unless you want a certain author for a specific reason, be on the lookout for opportunities to piggy-back on author events near you, or previously scheduled author tours that will bring them to your area. If an author will already be in or near your town, contact the sponsoring organization (for example, a humanities council, a writers' conference, or an arts nonprofit) and inquire if the visiting author might be available to come to your school during their visit. Often, authors are scheduled for an evening event but are free earlier in the day during school hours. You may still need to pay a fee, but often this is something an author is willing to do free of charge if they're already in town for another event. You might also contact the author directly in these cases, inquiring if they might be willing to tack on an extra day at either end of their visit in order to come to your school. Even this way, your costs are likely to be much less.

2. TRY A LOCAL AUTHOR

Local or regional authors are often much more affordable simply because travel and lodging may be cheaper. If an author is a quick flight or drive away, they might not even need to stay overnight, and therefore arrangements will be easier and less expensive. To list just a few authors who have visited Idaho from neighboring states: Ben Mikaelsen is in Montana; Jennifer Nielsen lives in Utah; April Henry resides in the Portland area; Chris Crutcher and Kelly Milner Halls are from Spokane.

3. APPLY FOR EXTRA \$\$\$

Ask your administrators if they have unencumbered funds that could help pay for the event. If your school has an active Parent Boosters group or if your library has a Friends group, see if they might be able to support the event financially.

Beyond that, look for grants, underwriting, or sponsorships. Does your district have a foundation to which you can apply for a special-project grant? Are there local businesses that might be willing to donate part of the funds, or is there a community group that could help?

4. COLLABORATE WITH A PARTNER

Working with a local bookstore can be extremely productive. They have publisher contacts librarians can only dream about. Often they will be hosting an author for an in-store event in the evening, leaving the author free for school visits earlier in the day. When partnering with a bookstore, they may want to sell books at your school in advance or on the day of the event. Or they may expect your school to buy a certain number of copies of the author's book. This is almost always well worth it if the bookstore or the publisher is footing the travel bill.

Consider collaborating with other schools as another way to make an author event more affordable. Authors are used to doing two or even three appearances in the same school day. While the overall fee may be larger, when split three ways it will be less expensive, especially considering lodging and meal expenses will also be shared.

WHAT DOES AN AUTHOR EVENT LOOK LIKE?

Author visits can take many forms, depending on your goals, the school's interests, your student body or community, and the author's flexibility.



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ASSEMBLY OR COMMUNITY EVENT

Most authors are used to speaking to large groups of students. They will have a prepared presentation, usually followed by some Q&A. Many authors will even give you a choice of two or three different talks they have ready to go. Work out with the author how much time you have or, if you're flexible, how much time they would like.

Any large space, such as an auditorium or gymnasium, will work. The author will probably expect you to have a projector and screen for them to use; most will bring their own laptop or tablet to connect to your projector. (Do confirm all tech details in advance -- projector, power source, cords and adaptors, etc. Authors are usually prepared to make almost any situation work, but you don't want it to be a last-minute headache.)

Consider carefully whom to invite. If you have the entire student body attend, do you have enough space for them? How will they behave? Will staff members be willing to attend and monitor behavior? Are your administrators prepared to pull a kid out if necessary? If the event is in a public venue, will it be ticketed? How will you approach security and crowd control?

For a more manageable crowd size, you could invite just one grade level or the attendees of a regular public library program. This works best if the author has written a book that is particularly suited to a certain age, or if the language arts classes at a particular level are reading something by that author.

Another strategy: Invite all students to attend, but require them to sign up in advance, cutting off sign-ups a day or two before the event. This tends to ensure a smaller crowd of more invested and interested students which probably means fewer behavior problems, as well. The main drawback -- teachers will need to stay in classrooms with partial classes, so you'll have fewer staff members in attendance at your cool event, and teachers will have lots of missing students for that period or two. Similarly, public libraries can require registration for the event.

CLASS PRESENTATION

You could have an author speak to just one or a few classes. An author is usually willing to tailor their presentation if they know their audience -- such as a creative writing class, an AP lit class, or a 7th grade reading class.

Depending on the size of your library or other available spaces, you could invite two or more classes in at once, providing a setting that is smaller than for an assembly but larger than for just a single classroom.

Get inventive: Are there two creative writing sections back to back? Could all those students be excused from one other class so the full group could attend an event that takes place during a two-period block?

Typically, authors are not interested in spending a full day at a school giving the same presentation each period, five or six times throughout the day. But if this is what works best for your school and your goals, it never hurts to ask. Be aware the author may expect a larger fee, perceiving this as several events as opposed to just one.

LUNCH

This is a great strategy for a book club event. Invite the kids who have read the author's book(s) to attend a special lunch with the author. Depending on your budget or preferences, perhaps the students bring their own lunches, or maybe you buy pizza or sub sandwiches. Maybe a group of parents or a local business would be willing to provide lunch.

Lunch events can be really memorable and intimate experiences but don't allow too many students to attend. Depending on the author's schedule and willingness, sometimes a lunch or book club event can be added to a larger presentation without it being considered a separate event, for which the author would expect additional payment. Pairing an assembly for a large group of students with a smaller, invitation-only event for the kids who went above and beyond can lead to a really satisfying author experience for everyone involved.

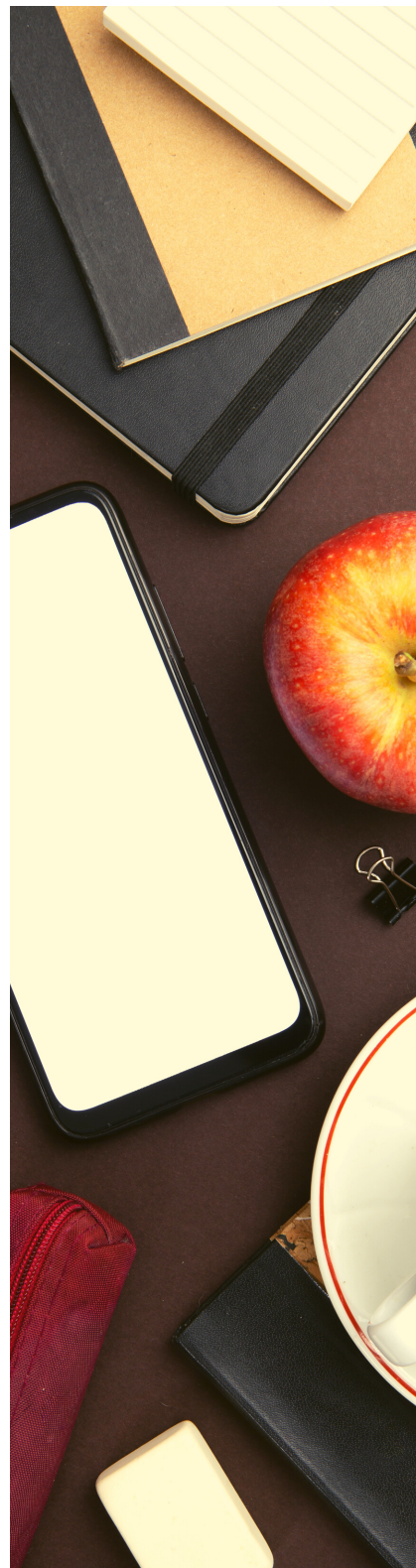
If you are hosting an author for a lunchtime event, be sure to ask about their food preferences ahead of time. Some authors are happy to eat pizza with the kids; some don't want to eat at all during a day when they're presenting; some would prefer a salad or have special dietary needs. Be sure to find out what beverage they'd like.

OKAY, WE'RE DOING IT! NOW WHAT?

Be organized. Be excited. Have fun!

GET ORGANIZED

- Contact the author. Make a plan. Double-check and confirm dates and fees.
- Clarify and confirm the schedule --
 - What time of day is the event and how long will it run?
 - Where will the author be presenting? (library, gym, classroom)
 - How many kids/attendees?
 - Will there be a meet-and-greet, a signing, etc.?



- Arrange for lodging according to the author's specifications. They may want a place close to the airport, or a hotel that serves a hot breakfast, or a place with free Wi-Fi. They will let you know these requests once you're getting close to actually booking an event.
- Arrange for transportation. Your author may need to be picked up at the airport, driven from hotel to the school and back again, transported between schools if sharing a visit, and so forth. On the day of the event, you will likely be too busy to do this yourself, so decide well in advance who will be driving each leg of the trip. Teachers, trusted parent volunteers, counselors, administrators -- anyone reliable can be tapped for this duty. Most authors will not expect to rent a car and would rather have someone who knows the area do the driving.
- Arrange for payment. School districts can be notoriously slow in paying bills, due to all sorts of paperwork and processes. Authors expect to be paid no later than the day of the event, so do the work in advance to make that happen. If the author needs to send an invoice, request that they send it ahead of time and have your business office pay it in advance. If for some reason you are uncomfortable paying the author before they arrive, make sure you have a check ready for them on the day of the event.
- Confirm the author's technology and equipment needs. They may need a projector and screen, a microphone, a

Wi-Fi connection. They might want a table or stool. Knowing these details well in advance gives you a chance to talk to the right people in your venue and make sure all the necessary components will be available, working properly, and ready to go when your author arrives.

GET EXCITED

- Start advertising your event four to six weeks in advance, especially if you want kids to read the author's books.
- Work with teachers to promote the event and the author's works in their classrooms. Encourage them to provide activities or assignments that front-load or enrich the author's content, or perhaps offer extra credit to students who read one of the author's books or participate in some other way.
- Think of all the ways to advertise the event: daily PA announcements, video announcements, parent newsletters, email, hallway flyers, and social media posts. If your school or library has a readerboard, advertise the event there, too.
- Consider hosting a book club just before the author visits, or even on the same day. An author event always goes more smoothly and is more fun for everyone if you have several students who are familiar with their work. Some sort of event that includes lunch or treats or special privileges can be a huge incentive to get even more kids to read the author's books ahead of time.

HAVE FUN!

- Consider welcoming the author in a fun way. Perhaps the school reader board can have a personalized welcome message. Maybe a team of kids could create a welcome poster for the school's front door, main hallway, or the space where the event will take place. Perhaps a small team of kids can be a welcoming committee (although you don't want to mob or overwhelm your visitor the moment they walk in the building).
- Depending on the author's schedule and whom else is involved in their visit, consider taking the author out to dinner the night before the event. Most authors will appreciate this. They're in a strange place, alone, and will probably enjoy the company, as well as a good meal at a nice restaurant the locals like. It's also good to meet each other, if possible, before the author walks in the front door of your school. If you're sharing the author with other schools, the dinner could include the author and the two or three librarians. If it's a solo event, you might invite a couple language arts teachers who have been particularly involved or supportive. Just you and the author could be awkward, but you also don't want to make it a big dinner for 10 or 12 people where the author will feel obligated to be "on stage," meeting and shmoozing with a crowd of eager fans. If an author would prefer to have the evening to themselves, they will say so.



THINGS TO DO THE DAY OF THE EVENT

- If you have someone picking up the author and bringing them to your school or library, confirm those details and times.
- Check in with everyone in your organization affected by the event. This might include the PE teachers giving up the gym, tech coordinators helping with set-up, administrators, and teachers losing instructional time to the event.
- If any part of your day involves food, make sure the plan is in place and the food is being delivered at the right time.
- When the author arrives, meet them at the front door or the main office. Ask if they need a restroom or have any other immediate needs. Show them around, giving them the lay of the land -- where they can stow their belongings, where they will be presenting, where the adult restroom is, etc.
- No matter what kind of event you're hosting (assembly, book club lunch, classroom talk, etc.) be sure to have a bottle of water or two for your author.
- When you introduce the author, be sure to thank your administrators and any other building personnel who helped make the event happen. Did the PE teacher give up the gym for a period or two? Did a tech person help you with equipment and set-up? Did the Parent Boosters or Friends Group provide funding, lunch, or other support? If a local bookstore, business, or civic organization sponsored the event in any way, make sure they get an extra special thanks.
- Have a check ready for the author if you have not already paid them in advance.
- You might consider giving the author a school or library gift... if it's something you think they'll really use. Does your school have T-shirts, water bottles, or ball caps with your school name and logo? If it seems like something that could be a useful memento of the visit for the author, this can be a nice gesture.
- Don't forget to take pictures! If you're worried you'll be too busy or forget to take photos, assign a colleague to the task. Everyone will have fun looking at the pictures when you post them later in the library, display them on a photo screen, or put them on the school's video announcements. These pictures will also be invaluable when you write up the experience for a parent newsletter, apply for a grant, or present your experience at a librarians' professional development meeting.

- Before the author leaves, ask if they would be willing to sign your library's copies of their books, as well as one of the event posters. Some libraries have a policy against autographed copies in their collections, but most schools do not. For years to come, those signed posters and books will be fun reminders of the event, and a cool thing to show kids when you're doing book talks or prepping for the next author visit.



Photo Credit: janoon028 on Freepik.com

AFTER THE EVENT

First of all, take some time to breathe and celebrate your success! An author visit is a lot of work, and you deserve to just relax a little bit once it's over.

Within a day, be sure to thank everyone in your building who made the event a success. An email is fine, perhaps to the entire staff expressing your thanks to everyone for their support, and singling out by name the people who played larger roles. You could also just send individual messages to the major players. A handwritten note is always nice, maybe with a bookmark enclosed or a piece of candy attached.

Even if they didn't do much, make sure you thank your administrators for their support and flexibility as you worked to arrange and host the event. If you make clear how much you appreciate them, they will be even more likely to support your efforts the next time you propose a program or library event.

Don't forget to thank any parents who helped with transportation, publicity, food, or other details. As you know, those enthusiastic parents are your most important allies.

If a local business or community group played a role in bringing that author to your school, send them a gracious thank you note as well. A local bookstore will appreciate your thanks and be that much more willing to work with you again, perhaps providing book discounts, prizes, or access the next time an author comes to town. The bookstore may even use your note as evidence to publishers of their success at hosting author visits, creating a climate that could bring more authors to your town in the future.

A civic group, arts council, or community organization will be able to use your note to confirm their nonprofit status and procure grants and other funding that will help them support local readers and bring in future authors.

And of course, you'll want to thank your visiting author! Again, this could be an email, but a handwritten note is nicer. It's a good idea to mention specific things they did that were a success, as well as reactions and outcomes at your school that they wouldn't be aware of otherwise. You might also include some pictures from the event with your note or email a few to the author. Often, authors have no other way of getting pictures of their school events. Your photo may even show up on their website or social media.

It can be fun to have students help with any of these thank you notes, especially the one to the author. You can tell the author that kids loved the presentation, or it encouraged them to read more books, or now they want to try writing stories of their own -- but if those messages come directly from kids, it's so much more powerful. Work with your language arts teachers to get notes from kids; it can be a great writing assignment in addition to a good lesson in social graces.



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SAMPLE EMAILS:



Dear friends at Brilliant Bookstore,

What fun we had when Andy Author visited our school last week! We really appreciate your help in arranging his visit and making the event possible. If you had not been hosting him for an in-store event, we never could have brought him here on our own. The kids enjoyed being able to buy a book on the spot and have Andy sign it. Thanks for coming out to our school to do that.

I look forward to our next collaboration, whatever that may be. Please keep us in mind for any future opportunities that arise!

Gratefully,
Linda Librarian

Dear Rebecca Writer,

Wow! Your recent visit to Magnificent Middle School was spectacular. Your presentation about what inspired you to become a writer, and how you came up with the idea for "**Murder in McCall**," was a big hit. Kids especially enjoyed seeing your pictures of McCall where you imagined key scenes of the mystery.

Thanks so much for staying for our Lunch Bunch Book Club. I know those kids loved eating pizza with a famous author and asking you questions. They are your biggest fans!

Thank you again for a wonderful visit. We loved it.
Lars Librarian



I JUST DON'T THINK I HAVE ENOUGH...

Time. Space. Money. Energy. Assistance. Staff buy-in. Administrative support.

All of these, and probably others, are fair reasons to think twice before hosting an author visit. Before you give up on the idea altogether, consider a **virtual author visit**.

Authors are often willing to do a Skype or Zoom visit for a fraction of their usual fee, or no fee at all. They don't have to travel, shake hands, or sign books. They probably won't have to prepare a slide show or formal presentation. From their point of view, it's an opportunity to promote their books and meet some fans with very little effort.

This works best for a small group, like a book club, where all the members have read the author's work, or a single class that may have been reading one of the author's books together. A virtual author visit is likely to be more informal, which has its pros and cons. You're less likely to get a carefully planned presentation designed to entertain the crowd and enrich your students' learning. But you're also more likely to get a personal, spontaneous conversation with the author, with far more opportunity for individual kids to ask questions and engage with the author.

Reach out to an author the same way you would for an in-person visit, inquiring if they do virtual visits. If they are willing, you can move on to details of scheduling, expectations, and tech requirements. Virtual visits can often be arranged with far less lead time than an in-person visit, since the author doesn't need to plan travel or be away from home.

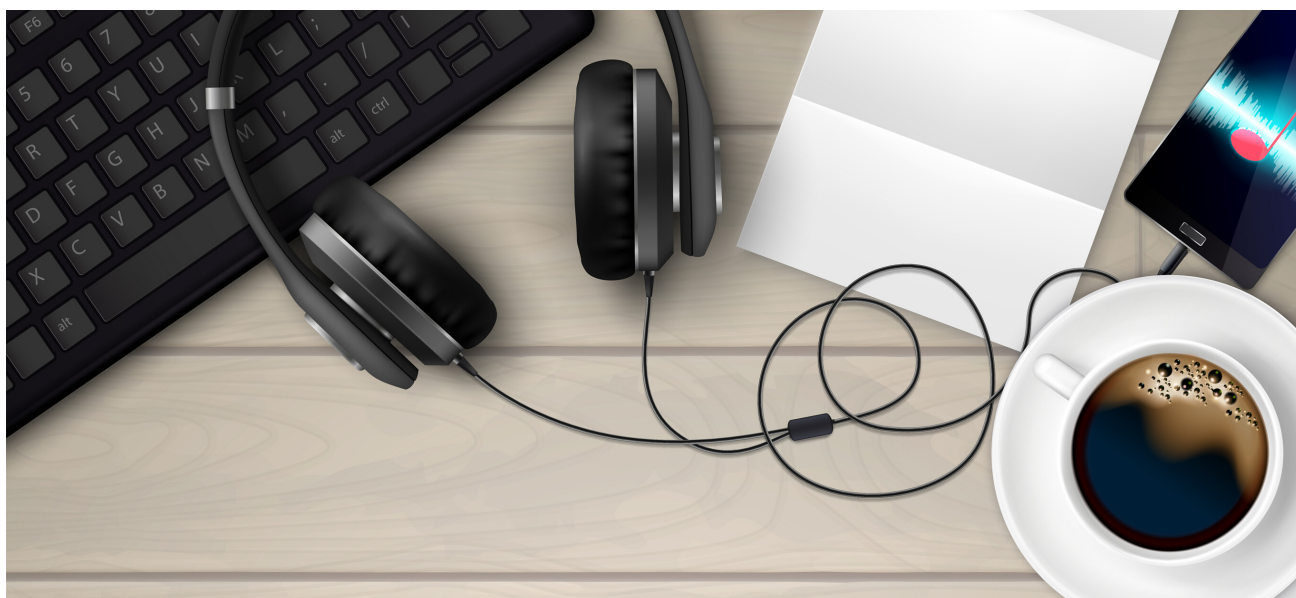


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OVERVIEW/OUTLINE/CHECKLIST

WHY?

When an author visits your school or library, it provides opportunities to:

- Promote literacy
- Increase library relevance and visibility
- Foster collaboration
- Encourage enrichment and learning extension
- Have fun!

FIRST STEPS

- Build staff enthusiasm
- Get administrator buy-in
- Look to collaborate with local bookstores, arts organizations, etc.
- Contact the author about availability and expenses
- Decide on size and format of event; book as early as possible
- Procure funding -- school funds, donations, grants, sharing costs

GETTING READY

- Plan the event -- how big, in what space, who's invited
- Publicize the event
- Build support and enthusiasm with staff members
- Make necessary arrangements in the school -- gym, tech, scheduling, etc.
- Book lodging for the author
- Plan transportation for the author
- Plan to take the author out to dinner when they arrive, if they're interested
- Create welcome sign; put welcome message on readerboard
- Organize a small welcoming committee of students
- Check the author's lunch preferences, if applicable

THE BIG DAY

- Double check all in-building needs (space, tech, schedule)
- Double check author transportation details
- Double check food arrangements, if applicable
- Greet the author at the front door or the office
- Show the author around; acquaint them with presentation space and amenities
- Provide a bottle or two of water
- Take pictures

Before the author leaves...

- Invite the author to sign library copies of their books
- Give the author a check if you haven't paid them in advance
- Give the author a school or library-themed gift (optional)

AFTER THE EVENT

- Thank everyone in-building who helped
- Thank your administrators for their support
- Thank parents, businesses, community groups, bookstores
- Send a thank you note to the author
- Encourage students to write thank you notes (coordinate with ELA teachers)
- Publicize your successful event (newsletters, video announcements, etc.)

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